

Johor MB still safe for now

Osman to meet PM today amid speculation that he will step down

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JOHOR BARU: The position of Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Osman Sopian looks safe for now after speculation swirled that he may have to step down.

It is understood that the Johor palace was dissatisfied with the way Osman handled the Sungai Kim Kim toxic gas contamination, which saw the closure of 111 schools in Pasir Gudang.

Speculation mounted that his career was in jeopardy when word got out that Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was set to meet Osman at his office in Putrajaya today.

A check with aides at the Prime Minister's Office confirmed that such a meeting was scheduled for the evening.

The meeting comes ahead of Dr Mahathir having to receive his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong at the Ninth Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat.

"Meeting is on. Talks – no idea," said a source when asked about the speculation of a reshuffle of both the mentri besar as well as the state exco line-up.

The retreat is also being attended by Lee's deputy and at least five other Singaporean ministers – the first since Pakatan Harapan came to power last year.

When contacted, Osman's press secretary Abdul Hakim Ab Rahman downplayed the meeting, calling it a "scheduled meeting".

"The Mentri Besar wanted to meet the Prime Minister to discuss matters on preparations for the retreat.

"There will be a pre-council meeting for the delegation and a dinner in conjunction with the retreat," he said, adding that early preparations for such meetings were the norm.

"Don't believe the rumours," Abdul Hakim added.

Should Osman have to go, among the contenders for the post are Johor Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee chairman Dr Sahrudin Jamal, who is from Bersatu, and State Youth, Sports and Culture Committee chairman Mohd Khuzzan Abu Bakar from PKR.

Osman, who is also state Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia and Pakatan Harapan chairman, is under pressure following a series of missteps since assuming the Mentri Besar post, the latest of which was the federal government's proposed Ship-to-Ship transfer hub project in Johor Baru earlier this month.

Following criticism that Putrajaya had bulldozed the project, Dr Mahathir said Osman was well aware of the planned development.

The Kempas assemblyman was also heavily criticised when he went to Batam at the height of the Sungai Kim Kim toxic gas

contamination crisis.

There has also been talk of a recent housing scandal involving the purchase of a property with huge discounts.

The meeting between Dr Mahathir and Osman will also take place amid the backlash following the Prime Minister's announcement on Friday that the Malaysian government had been forced to retract acceding to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

During the press conference on Friday, a visibly upset Dr Mahathir said the government "was forced" to withdraw following confusion created by those with political interests, calling it an attempt to undermine both the government and him as the Prime Minister.

He also alluded several times to the involvement of royalty in protests against the ratification.

Meanwhile, Johor PKR chairman Hassan Abdul Karim expressed support for Osman to remain as Mentri Besar, saying that there was no need for a reshuffle of the state exco for the time being.

"As the Johor PKR chairman, trust Osman. I'm quite vocal in criticising him openly, but he listens and is sincere in developing Johor.

"He works together with other component parties," he said, adding that there were regular state Pakatan council meetings chaired by Osman.

"So, we meet him regularly and

we have a platform to offer suggestions and politely criticise him in the closed door meetings.

"He accepts the criticism positively," said Hassan.

While he acknowledged Osman's shortcomings, Hassan said it was necessary for leaders in the state to give him time and space.

"We must also be fair to the Mentri Besar. We don't know whether some of the allegations are true or fake, so we are giving space to him to answer.

"Unless he commits a very serious legal, moral or political blunder, then it might be time to reshuffle," he said.

Asked about PKR taking over the Mentri Besar seat from Bersatu, Hassan, who has known Osman since their schooling days in Pontian, said all that would be decided at the national leadership.

Another state politician said Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin would be among those to help decide the names for the next mentri besar, pointing out that the candidate would likely be from the party as presently, it had 11 assemblymen while DAP 14, Amanah nine and PKR five.

"How can a party with only five assemblymen be given the mentri besar seat?" he said.

Hassan added that the next mentri besar would have to juggle between working with the federal government, the palace and the

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> **April 6:** At least 300,000 residents were affected by water disruptions in Johor



Baru when high levels of ammonia were detected in Sungai Sayong.

> **March 15:** Osman drew flak for going on a working trip to Batam when the Sungai Kim Kim toxic waste crisis was taking place.

> **Feb 14:** His biodata on a Johor government portal was changed after he admitted he did not complete his studies in Universiti Putra Malaysia following queries about his qualifications.

> **Jan 10:** A video clip went viral showing Osman being stopped from getting into a Proton Saga car with Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar and Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

> **Jan 9:** Relations with Singapore were strained when Osman went into disputed waters during a visit to Johor Baru port. Wisma Putra had said that it contacted Osman to tell him not to proceed with the visit.

Johor civil service.

Asked about the possibility of the state assembly being dissolved to pave the way for a snap election, he said this was unlikely as Pakatan had more than two-thirds majority with 39 seats.

Johor has 56 state seats and 26 parliamentary seats.